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ABSTRACT

The educational change strategy termed "reaching success through involvement" (RSI) has yielded promising results in creating school effectiveness. This paper analyzes the theoretical bases and practical applications of RSI strategy among 14 schools over an 8-year period. RSI theory assumes that educational organizations are dynamic social systems and that a strong learning culture results through changes in social agreements among members of the system (Homans 1950; Hall 1976). Administrators and teachers effect a strong learning culture by bringing students into the processes of involvement, problem solving, and identification. Eleven steps followed by 41 schools using RSI strategy include formation of a teachers' planning council and a student leadership group. Qualitative and quantitative data formed the analysis of culture and learning productivity. The "school report card" method provided ratings on productivity, culture, and "climate" based on detailed analysis. These categories contain evaluative components; for example, academic achievement, socialized behavior, and public image are components of productivity. The report presents a tabled composite of changes for 14 selected schools indicating degree of improvement in targeted areas. Schools classified as effective showed greatest improvement. Tentative findings supported RSI theory, though further research is needed concerning academic achievement and long-term changes in school culture. Fifteen references are appended. (CJH)

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REACHING SUCCESS THROUGH INVOLVEMENT--IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY FOR CREATING AND MAINTAINING EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

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REACHING SUCCESS THROUGH INVOLVEMENT-- IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY FOR CREATING AND MAINTAINING EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

by Willis J. Furtwengler

This presentation will describe an educational change strategy which, over the past decade, has yielded promising results in improving and maintaining school effectiveness. The model has been implemented in fourteen schools located in five states; it has been adopted recently by Tennessee to be implemented in eighteen schools across the state. In addition, the strategy is being implemented in 10 schools located in four states including Massachusetts. This change strategy, labeled "Reaching Success through Involvement," or RSI, has also been listed in a recent National Institute of Education publication describing effective school implementation strategies (1985). This paper will answer three questions about the RSI strategy. First, what is the theoretical basis for the change strategy which has yielded promising results? Secondly, how does the strategy work? Lastly, how well does the change strategy work, and what have we learned about the use of the implementation strategy?

I. Assumptions, Concepts, and Theory

Assumptions about the Strategy

The promising strategy for creating and maintaining effective schools outlined in this paper rests on four basic assumptions. First, it assumes, as others have suggested, that direct links exist between the social milieu of a school and the learning productivity of that school (Purkey & Smith, 1983). Educational organizations are thus viewed as dynamic social systems. When the culture and/or climate of the school are altered, the school's productivity is presumed to change also. A growing body of evidence suggests that this assumption is a principle which can be applied to change in most school settings (Furtwengler, 1985).

A second assumption undergirding the strategy is that creating and maintaining a strong learning culture and a positive school climate occurs through changes in, or reinforcement of, specific social agreements (Homans, 1950; Hall, 1976; and Furtwengler, 1985). Social agreements are the decisions teachers and students make as a result of their involvement in the daily activities of the school.

The third assumption is that administrators and teachers can create a change strategy that will produce social agreements supportive of a strong culture and a positive school climate. The steps in the change strategy described later on are one way these processes can be structured to improve or maintain an effective school.

The fourth assumption is that students, particularly at the secondary level, should be considered much more as members of organizations than as clients of school (Rutter et al., 1979; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982). Therefore, students should be involved in changing the culture and climate of the school in efforts to create and maintain an effective school.

Conditions for Implementation

The first of six conditions for creating and maintaining more effective schools is that administrators usually make a commitment to the school improvement or maintenance effort before teachers and students become involved (Clark, Lotto, & Astuto, 1984; Loucks et al., 1982). Administrators help to establish visions or possibilities and they set the broad parameters for what might happen before teachers and students define the specifics of the change endeavor.

The second condition for change in schools requires that those advocating change recognize the interrelatedness of what happens in schools. To change one of "the ways we do things around here" is to change them all (Homans, 1950; Derr & Deal, 1979).

A third condition of change is the administrator's knowledge of the political climate in the school. The administrator and others interested in exercising leadership must know who has influence, who does not have influence, and who might develop influence. This information is vital to administrators' and teachers' effective use of the core change processes. (The "core" processes will be discussed later on.) The political assessment helps identify the formal and informal leaders who may need to participate initially in the core processes.

A fourth condition which precedes change is that those who are trying to create change must believe that their efforts to increase effectiveness will be successful. That is, administrators, teachers, and students must believe that the level of school effectiveness can be altered (Fullan, 1982).

A fifth condition is the use of consultants, either internal or external, to facilitate the change process. The assistance must be continuous over time to be useful, and it must be perceived as practical and personal (Clark, Lotto, & Astuto, 1982). The consultant must understand the change process and should weave practical short-range methods for creating change together with efforts which take longer to achieve. One of the most critical aspects of the consultant's job is to know the role of the building administrator and how the person perceives the implementation of the change process.

Lastly, the administrator should know how or be willing to learn how to involve others in the design and implementation of the improvement effort. This means that the administrator must be willing to share information, share influence or leadership, and share decisions with others (Furtwengler, 1985). The administrator must be willing to alter or to put aside the usual bureacratic roles and responsibilities which are assigned to administrators, teachers, and students. The administrator should be willing to establish an organizational structure and processes that encourage and stimulate teachers and students to assume leadership roles in the pursuit of effectiveness. These six conditions need to be met if efforts to create or maintain an effective school are to be successful.

Conceptual Model and Theory of Change

The conceptual model for the RSI strategy that I have described is derived from two sources (Derr & Deal, 1979; Homans, 1950) and is based on the assumption that educational organizations are dynamic social systems. George Homans was one of the first theorists to stress the interdependency of tasks, interactions, and attitudes in social systems. In schools, attitudes are embeded in social agreements that dictate

the behaviors expected of administrators, teachers, and students in various situations. The repeated expressions of the social agreements through student behaviors become school norms. School norms influence the choices students make, individually and collectively about both their attitudes and their behaviors.

Newcomb, Turner, and Converse further explain the establishment of school norms (1965). They argue that the attraction people feel for each other increases with the number of personal interactions they share. In other words, the more people interact, the more their social agreements are likely to reflect positive attitudes toward each other. And, the greater the attraction of people toward each other, the more powerful norms become in controlling group behavior. In schools where the norms are powerful influencers of behavior, the culture of the school is considered strong. The strength of the culture is one of the factors which contributes to the ease or difficulty of improving some schools.

Changing the social milieu, which includes the culture and climate, in schools for the purposes of creating or maintaining excellent schools means altering the social agreements about (1) the way needs are to be met, (2) what creates meaning in life, and (3) "how we do things around here." How can this be accomplished? Fullan (1982) stated that "educational change is a process of coming to grips with the multiple realities of people who are the main participants in implementing change." Teachers and students find meaning in their lives through making decisions to focus on and attend to specific aims, projects, relationships, and/or activities. These decisions are made in the context of situations. A decision and the context in which it is made are viewed as a whole. In this regard, mutual decisions to attend to specific aims become social agreements related to the one or more elements of a situation. The stronger the social agreements the more the students' or teachers' behavior will be shaped by the situation. Refocusing their attention on new aims and activities does not occur like pushing a switch. Both teachers and students can learn how to use processes for making changes in their social agreements and goals.

Administrators, teachers, and students can structure the use of three processes to build and maintain a social milieu which increases the learning productivity in schools. Social agreements are developed through the active participation of teachers and students in three core processes (Hall, 1976). The three processes are: (1) the involvement process, (2) the group problem-solving process, and (3) the identification process. *Involvement* is the process of actively rather than passively engaging in interactions with one's external environment. This interaction includes acting on or responding to situations. The involvement process can include either conscious, problem-solving thinking or unconscious, automatic thinking. Unconscious or automatic thinking involves the use of learned responses--rather than learning responses--in situations. For example, the teacher reads the situation and, without much thought, responds by using previously recorded action chains with which he/she is familiar. *Problem-solving* is the process of consciously thinking about the discrepancy between two perceived conditions--for example, what should be and what is, what is understood and what is not understood, and so on. Obviously, goal setting is a part of the problem-solving process.

Identification is the process of defining personal boundaries of responsibility for making things work. For example, a group of students--call them group A-- may consider "the way we do things around here" to be the way that all groups should act. Through the identification process, group A has extended its boundaries to include, as part of its responsibility, making groups B, C, and D work as it does. When group A cannot make the other groups act like group A, the members in group A feel frustrated. An alternative solution to group A's problem may be to redefine its

responsibilities through the identification process. In this situation, group A may view other groups as outside of its boundaries of responsibilty. Since other groups are not considered a part of group A, it does not need to make the other groups behave the way it behaves. The identification process usually accompanies involvement in the problem-solving process.

These three core processes, when used by teachers and students, work together to alter or reinforce their social agreements and the social milieu. The specific application of these processes may vary, but each is necessary if the social agreements which usually control behavior are to be altered. Schien (1985) argues rather persuasively that "culture ... part of the social milieu ... is the assumptions (I believe social agreements may be a better term) that the group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of adaptation and internal integration." He adds that these social agreements, to constitute culture, "must have worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems."

The design of the strategy for change must focus on issues which surround the application of these three processes. For example, what will it take for teachers and students to participate in these processes, when should they be involved, who should be involved, what problems should be addressed through their involvement, and what latitude do people have in determining new identifications?

The RSI strategy which has been developed over the past ten years is presented in the next section to answer some of these questions.

II. The RSI Implementation Strategy

The RSI strategy was used with 41 schools among the 147 schools for which I have served as a consultant. These 41 schools differed from all others in that their school improvement projects were long-term, i.e., conducted for periods ranging from 12 to 36 months. These schools were located in cities, suburbs, and in rural areas. The strategies for change that all 41 schools used involved similar steps. The steps in the sequence in which they generally occurred were as follows:

1. The principals and assistant principals recognized and accepted their responsibility for their schools' overall level of effectiveness (Bickell, 1983).

2. Each principal appointed a planning council of 10 to 15 teachers to determine changes that the school should make to increase its effectiveness. The planning council, which includes the administrators, and one or more consultants collected and analyzed information about the school's learning productivity, culture, and climate and prepared a report on its findings.

3. The planning council presented its report to the rest of the faculty, along with its recommendations and plans for action related to school improvement.

4. Using recommendations from teachers, students, administrators, and parents, the planning council established a student leadership group of 50 to 100 youngsters.

5. The entire planning council and several members of the student leadership group formed a committee to plan a three-day retreat focused on leadership training and problem-solving activities.

6. The planning council and the entire student leadership group took part in the retreat, formed the school leadership team, and were divided into several task forces charged with solving specific school problems.

7. Four half-day meetings of the task forces occurred during the school year. These half-day meetings were held to assess the progress of the task forces and to rededicate the task force members to the mission of improving the school.

8. Members of the planning council, along with other interested faculty members, planned inservice training activities tailored to the needs of the entire faculty.

9. As the school year progressed, changes in the effectiveness of the school were documented. The task forces presented these findings to the school leadership team, to the entire faculty, and to the student body. Progress was recognized with special celebrations.

10. After twelve months, the planning council with one or more consultants initiated a major data collection process involving information from many sources. A comparative analysis of the data was made to determine the extent to which problems involving the school's learning productivity and culture and climate had been solved and aims attained.

11. The executive committee of the school leadership team or the planning council established a procedure for electing or appointing new members to the team each year.

Prior to the beginning of the RSI implementation strategy, the principal of each school attended a meeting to become familiar with the implementation of the change strategy. Each principal requested a follow-up meeting to learn more about how the strategy works and what the person would have to do to implement the program in his/her school. The degree to which each principal required assistance from outside of his/her building varied. Several principals implemented improvement programs with little assistance from external consultants. These principals requested assistance on three different occasions to implement the program. Their first request reflected a need for assistance in the data collection process. Secondly, they also wanted comparative school data from other schools. Lastly, they required some assistance in designing and conducting the annual school retreat. Other than requiring assistance in these three areas, the principals were able to successfully implement the school improvement program. In each of these situations, the principal had been

trained in the principles of organizational development and group process. They simply had not applied their knowledge to their school situation.

A version of the RSI implementation strategy is currently being tested which includes a one to two day inservice training program for all teachers just before school opens. The topics for this inservice training are classroom management procedures and establishing and changing classroom norms.

The eleven steps in the change strategy are standard, with three important exceptions. First, one or more consultants working with these schools collected and analyzed school information from a variety of sources (steps 2 and 10). Second, the analysis of the school's level of effectiveness or school report card included an assessment of the culture and climate of the school (steps 3 and 10). Third, for effective change to occur, the involvement of students in the change process was seen as essential (steps 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11). Both formal and informal student leaders participated in the schoolwide change efforts.

The involvement of students tended to be concentrated in three areas. First, students participated in training that was designed to help them understand leadership and organizations. Second, students helped to identify school problems from their perspective and proposed solutions. Third, students were active on task forces that implemented plans to correct or reduce those problems. The annual retreat proved the most effective vehicle for fostering students' involvement in the change process.

The steps in the RSI strategy, as just outlined, answer some of the questions regarding who should be involved in making what decisions, but it does not specify the nature of problems and information used to develop a profile of the school. The next section outlines the methods used in the RSI program and the format for presenting information about the school's productivity and social milieu.

The School Report Card

The *School Report Card* helps educators determine what actions need to be initiated if improvements are needed. Ratings and interpretative narrative on the *School Report Card* are derived from an assessment of the school's learning productivity, culture, and climate. Data are collected through: (1) interviews with school personnel including students and, usually, parents; (2) compilation of written inventories; (3) observations of personnel and activities in the school; and (4) reviews of records kept by the school. The process of determining a school's rating also includes comparisons completed by a team of RSI facilitators in consultation with the school's planning council. Data gathered and analyzed are compared with (1) similar data from other schools, (2) the school's previous record, and (3) the school or district's standards or aims for that particular school. These comparisons are first made through a consensus decision-making process used by RSI facilitators. The facilitators' philosophy, biases, and definitions of effective schools are shared with the school's planning council before these preliminary findings are reviewed with the council. Once council members have discussed the findings and have agreed that the report card is an accurate picture of the school as they know it, the information on the report card is shared with the faculty.

The *School Report Card* provides a separate rating for three components of school productivity, six components of school culture, and school climate. The components rated were derived from the research findings on effective schools and

from the problems that 41 schools have worked on during the past decade. The ratings standards used are as follows:

**** A four-star rating represents a school component that was judged to be excellent. A four-star rating usually signifies that this component is similar to ones found in the best schools in the country.

*** A three-star rating represents a school component that was judged to be effective. The three-star rating signifies that the component is quite good, but not outstanding.

** The two-star rating awarded to a school component signifies that the school needs to increase the effectiveness of that aspect of productivity or culture. The two-star rating also signifies that attempts are being made to improve that component.

* A one-star rating represents a school component that needs immediate improvement. The one-star rating also signifies that the school is making little effort to improve that component.

The three components of school productivity, or outputs of the school, are academic achievement, socialized behavior, and public image. These components may be defined as follows:

Academic Achievement is the knowledge students have, their skills in processing information, their performance in applying what they know in problem-solving situations, and their attitudes toward learning.

Socialized Behavior is the students' exhibition of social behaviors which meet the standards for responsible behavior by students in their community and this country.

Public Image is the views of school personnel and community members as to whether the school is meeting both community needs and student needs.

School culture, simply stated, is "the way we do things around here." Shared social agreements among school personnel and students determine the culture of the school. Six key components of any school's culture are identified in the following descriptions.

Structure and Order is defined as the policies, procedures, and management roles implemented in schools.

Social Acceptance is defined as the presence among most individuals of a sense of belonging to the organization.

Mission and Vision is defined as the school's reasons for being and doing and the long-term goals of what the organization is to become.

Academic Emphasis is defined as the general and continuous support for the teaching/learning activities in the school.

Problem Solving is defined as the extent to which individuals and groups are involved in confronting and working through school problems.

The final component represented on the *School Report Card* is school climate. School climate, which is part of the social milieu, is defined as the way teachers, administrators, and students feel about what they have agreed--explicitly and implicitly--to do in the school and about the actions taken pursuant to those agreements.

Multiple measures are used within each of these broad components. The data from these measures are aggregated and used in making the rating and in developing the narrative which accompanies each report card. (A book to be published by Allyn and Bacon will provide details about the process and instruments used in data collection.) Comparisons are made using the report card to determine the status of each school. This information also is used to assess the effectiveness of the RSI strategy.

III. Results of RSI Implementation Strategy in 14 Schools

Does the RSI strategy of student involvement work? Overall, the answer to this question appears to be "yes." The RSI program seems to have promise for solving many problems in schools. Both quantitative and qualitative data support this conclusion. But there are some unanswered questions surrounding academic achievement and changes in long-standing aspects of the school culture.

This study spanned the past eight years in 14 self-selected schools, except for two schools where the central office persuaded the staff at the school to enter the program. The schools were located in three midwestern states and one southern state. The demographic characteristics of the schools ranged from inner-city schools in low socio-economic settings to suburban schools with predominantly white middle-class populations. Nine were high schools, two were elementary schools, and the remaining three were middle or junior high schools. One school was located in a rural setting.

A composite of the changes in the school report card ratings for all 14 schools is shown in Table 1. The numbers shown there indicate the rating changes which occurred during the implementation of the change strategy in terms of the four-star rating system. A "+1" indicates that the rating for that particular component improved by one star. A "0" indicates no change in the rating.

TABLE I

Rating Changes Among 14 Schools

	Less Effective					Moderately Effective					Effective			
School	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
Ach.	0	+1?	+1?	0	+1?	0	0	+1?	0	0	0	+1?	0	0
Disc.	+2	+2	+2	0	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	0	0	+1	0
P I	0	+1	+1	0	+2	0	+1	0	0	+1	0	+1	+1	0
S/O	+2	+2	+2	+1	0	+1	-1	0	+1	0	0	0	0	+1
S A	0	+2	+2	+1	+1	0	+1	+1	0	+1	0	0	+1	+1
M/V	+1	+2	+2	+1	+1	0	+1	+1	+1	0	+1	+1	+1	0
A E	+1	+1	+1	0	+1	0	0	0	0	+1	0	0	0	0
PS*														
Clim.	+1	+2	+1	+1	+1	+1	0	+1	+1	+2	0	+1	+1	+1

Key: Ach.=Achievement; Disc.=Discipline; P I=Public Image; S/O=Structure and Order; S A=Social Acceptance; M/V=Mission and Vision; A E=Academic Emphasis; C=Climate
*Ratings for problem-solving for these schools are not available because this component of the culture is a recent addition to the RSI School Report Card.

As Table 1 shows, the schools varied in both the level of improvement and in the components in which improvement occurred. Schools that were classified as less effective--one or two stars in most categories--showed the greatest improvement. Schools A through E demonstrate this point. Specific changes in the socialized behavior in these schools are reported in a recent *Kappan* article (Furtwengler, 1985). As program implementations continue (28 schools are currently involved in implementing the strategy), research on ways to improve the effectiveness of the strategy will be furthered. More than a decade of research lies ahead in answering questions about the process of creating and maintaining effective schools.

The study of these 14 RSI implementations, as difficult as it was to conduct without adequate funding, did reveal some interesting tentative findings relative to the implementation strategy itself. Three years from now, I may be able to make some stronger statements about the results of such implementations. At this juncture, the findings are these:

One, students at the secondary level, especially, need to be involved as members of the organization when attempts are made to create or maintain an effective school. Their contributions are significant in the RSI change strategy.

Two, educators can be trained to implement the RSI strategy. Several of the implementations in the 14 schools were guided by persons who had been trained to facilitate the process. The nature of the training needed is being refined.

Three, six broad categories of school problems emerged repeatedly during use of the implementation strategy. The retreat groups identified problems associated

with academic achievement, human relations, school spirit and pride, building and grounds, school image, and involvement. Changes in the culture and climate at the school were directly related to decisions to solve one or more of several specific problems in these six areas.

Four, the strength of commitment to social agreements within a school varies. Some social agreements among teachers and students attracted a strong commitment while others gather little attachment or weak commitment. Those agreements which are backed by strong shared commitments and the behaviors associated with them are difficult to alter, while those which receive less commitment are easier to change. The difficulty in changing the culture of a school which has had a long-standing reputation cannot be minimized. A multi-year commitment is necessary to alter the social agreements in a school with a strong culture.

Five, secondary teachers need more symbolic reasons and time to interact with each other to build a positive school climate and learning culture for their school than do elementary teachers. Significant differences exist between the social milieus of elementary schools and secondary schools. It is much easier to create a shared commitment to a mission and vision among elementary teachers. They communicate more often than do secondary teachers, and they share similar problems with other teachers. In secondary schools, the problems that teachers encounter are mostly dissimilar--and usually require more time to discuss and resolve. Hence, secondary teachers need more time to solve problems in creating and maintaining a social milieu which supports effective schools.

Six, in effective schools, student involvement may occur rather quickly during the implementation process. The student involvement usually occurred within the first three months of the implementation. Moderately effective schools by contrast were somewhat anxious about student involvement. They wanted first to develop procedures that would insure fairness, firmness, and consistency in their dealings with students. In less effective schools, the faculty's primary interest was survival. In such schools, it took at least six months for faculty members to feel secure enough to involve students in combined faculty-student, problem-solving sessions.

Further research is planned to answer questions about the relationships that may exist between the social milieu of the schools and the ecology of classrooms. Little research has been done to discover what specifically happens to individuals or to groups of students when social agreements are altered. Other adaptations of the RSI model are being tested, especially one which eliminates the three-day retreats. Early findings suggest that the retreat simply increases the rate at which social agreements are changed. The retreat may serve as an excuse for a school to "begin again " as an organization.

This paper has presented the RSI strategy for creating and maintaining effective schools. It has suggested a specific theory of change that can be applied to a variety of schools interested in improving or retaining their effectiveness. Much more research needs to be conducted on the strategy, and those researchers and practitioners interested in this strategy may want to contact me at the Vanderbilt University.

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